

Reading News Building (Sharp Building)  
22-24 North Fifth Street  
Reading  
Berks County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5145

HABS,  
PA,  
6-READ,  
6-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. PA-5145

## READING NEWS BUILDINGS - SHARP BUILDING

Location: 22-24 North Fifth Street  
Reading, Pa. 19601.

Present Owner: American Bank & Trust Co.  
35 North Sixth Street  
Reading, Pa. 19601

Present Use: Abandoned - Slated for Demolition July/August 1980.

Significance: The City of Reading has witnessed the appearance and disappearance of numerous newspapers since the origin of the town's existence. The first newspaper appeared in 1789, since then 114 newspapers have been published; this includes weeklies and dailies. The Reading News was established in 1912 but went out of business sometime that same year. Having had such a short life, little has been recorded of its history. The overall building with its beauty arts details, reflects attention to detail not usually affordable in the 1980's. Beaux

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A.. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: March 26, 1912.
2. Architect: William A. Sharp, Designer/Builder.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

References to the chain of title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Berks County Court House, Reading, Pennsylvania.

1912 Deed, March 26, 1912, recorded in Volume 227, page 91: Hamilton Godfrey to Gilbert S. Jones.

1913 Deed, January 21, 1913, recorded in Volume 398, page 532, and Volume 398, page 534: Hamilton Godfrey and Gilbert S. Jones to the News Corporation at a sheriff's sale to George D. Horst.

1916 Deed, June 1, 1916, recorded in Volume 384, page 650: George D. Horst to William A. Sharp.

1933 Deed August 16, 1933, recorded in Volume 47, page 146: William A. Sharp to Raymond Sharp and Florence Sharp Kirkpatrick by will.

1938 Deed, December 31, 1938, recorded in Volume 813, page 248: Raymond Sharp and Florence Sharp Kirkpartrick to South Temple Realty Corporation.

1938  
to:

Present Deed, Volume 970, page, 276: South Temple Realty Corporation to Colonial Berks American Bank.

4. Builder and Contractor

William A. Sharp 1874-1933, a major building contractor in Reading.

5. Original Plan and Construction

The building was especially designed for newspaper, completely fireproof, built with steel girders, concrete floors and a terra cotta exterior with limestone trimmings. The first floor is structurally reinforced by extra 8' diameter steel columns in the basement.

First Floor: Business offices and press room. The press itself was known as a four deck Goss Straightline. This machinery, when it was installed, could be seen from the sidewalk through a large plate glass storefront window.

Second Floor: Editorial departments.

Third Floor: Mechanical departments.

6. Alterations

See floor plans with recent partition walls attached to this form.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected With the Structure:

None other than the newspaper editor and the building contractor.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Original Architectural drawings
2. Old views

3. Bibliography

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Berks County, Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Berks County Courthouse, Reading, PA.

Berks County, Register of Wills, Berks County Courthouse, Reading, PA.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Fox, Cyrus T. Reading and Berks County, Pennsylvania, New York, 1925, Volume II, p. 48.

Reading Eagle, October 6, 1912, August 2, 1933, Reading, PA.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: There are but few examples of the Beaux Arts style within the confines of the City of Reading. This particular building is therefore significant from that standpoint and also in its own right, as it exemplifies a quality of masonry craftsmanship on the facade of the structure which is no longer extant.
2. Condition of fabric: Although the building has been in a state of disrepair for some time resulting from being abandoned for nearly three or four years, it is nevertheless, still in rather good condition.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: 55' in depth and 31' wide.
2. Foundation: field stone and concrete (conjecture).
3. Wall construction, finish and color: brick and granite facing, general appearance grey.
4. Structural system, framing: steel girders spanning the width of the building, concrete floor slab, extra pipe columns in basement to support the printing presses on the first floor.

5. Openings: vary from floor to floor. The first floor facade is composed of two equal arched openings. Within the openings are entrances and storefronts topped by leaden glass transom windows. At the second level the facade is divided into three openings. The end two windows occupy  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the facade while a center bay window occupies the middle half. The end windows have flat arch lintels. The bay window is three sided with casements at the sides and a plate glass window in the center. Leaded transom windows are above. The third floor is divided into four equal openings. The window openings have low arched lintels. The windows are casement. There is a plate glass opening inside the building in the main foyer where one could observe the printing presses when they were still installed. This plate glass window is on the north side of the foyer and it is approximately eight feet wide. The rear of the building has 20 sash windows in groups of two with the first floor having larger windows, topped by clear leaden glass transoms. The steel staircase is illuminated by a skylight.
6. Roofs: flat, low slope composed of asphalt slag. The cornice is made of limestone and supported by five stone brackets. The parapet line is topped off by an open stone balustrade centered with a stone carved panel which reads "The Reading News." On either side of the building are brick pilasters which reach a few feet above the cornice. These are decorated with a carved silhouette of helmeted figure with pendant grapes. The third floor is of a light yellowish brick while the first and second floors are faced with stone limestone blocks. At the third floor level there is a pent cave or limestone cornice supported by 17 dentils. This part of the building is decorated with two stone fluted pilasters topped by scroll work and with the previously mentioned grape motif. A curious, if not awkward, feature of the building is a low sloping rectangular roof which surmounts the three sided bay window. This roof appears to be made of concrete. It emanates from the intersection of the underside of the cornice at the third floor level and projects approximately 16' past the bay window. The cornice of the bay window roof is ornamented in a style reminiscent of a Japanese tile roof. A first floor cornice completes the tripartite division of the building. This cornice is made of the same stone material as the other two cornices, but protrudes along the lines of the bay window. A central, nearly four feet high stone bracket underneath the bay acts as a central focus. Two stone brackets of smaller dimensions are situated on either side of this main bracket.

Description of Interior (See attached floor plans)

The first floor has been severely altered as have the other floors of the building. This has been done by erecting partitions, and even by adding a mezzanine between the first and second floors. What was a large lobby has now been transformed, because of a partition, into a rather narrow corridor. A handsome arch at the rear of this lobby has, therefore, been "cut" in half and the sense of open space has been entirely removed. One can still discern plaster scroll work around the perimeter of the ceiling; but the effect is lost due to the inappropriate partitions. There is also plaster scroll work on the ceiling itself and various areas may still be seen but the baroque effect intended has been lost. The original plan of the first floor was intended to expose the printing presses which were located on the north side of the building. These could be viewed by the public from outside the building and from a plate glass window inside the building as well. Other architectural craft features worthy of comment are the wainscoting on the original walls. These vertical panels are 54' high and are composed of oak. The floors are made of poured concrete. The stairs leading up to the other floors are made of steel, although the banister is of round oak. Original to the building is an elevator. The structural detail which is worthy of comment are the steel posts which reinforced the floor section under which the printing presses stood. These posts may be seen in the basement. Another feature that was added to the building between the mezzanine and the first floor, but at a later date than the original erection of the building, is a clear leaded glass window which has been painted over. The name of the builder of this building who later became its owner is inscribed as part of the design; it reads W. Sharp Contractor and Builder. There is little to say about the mezzanine except that it was and remains an inappropriate addition. A mezzanine was never intended for this building. The ceiling in this space is terribly low, less than eight feet, in comparison to all other rooms in the building. The second floor of the building retains its original floor plans. The main room encompassing a large space with three rear offices across the hall. The walls are of plaster without ornament and the wood floor is covered in linoleum. The third floor plan is arranged somewhat differently. The main room is partitioned into three major spaces of offices, while the rear portion of the third floor is relegated to a single room unlike the other floors.

PART III PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Bureau of Planning, City Hall, Reading, Pa. in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort in the CNA and American Bank Development Project, Callowhill Historic Dis-

trict. John A. Burns, AIA and Emily J. Harris were the HABS project coordinators. The written data was prepared in the HABS office by Michel R. Lefevre, Planning Technician, Bureau of Planning. Photographs were taken by David A. Gentry in April 1980 and measured floor plans were done by M. Schneiderman. The data was edited and prepared for transmittal by Patricia Rowse in the HABS office in August 1980.





READING, PENNSYLVANIA

ING NEWS BUILDING / A SHARP BUILDING

## NOTES:

- 1 WALLS OF PLASTER
- 2 CEILINGS OF PLASTER
- 3 FLOORS OF ASBESTOS TILE UNLESS  
NOTED OTHERWISE

## KEY:

-  ORIGINAL CONSTRUCTION
-  RECENT CONSTRUCTION
-  PROPERTY LINE
-  SKYLIGHT

SURVEYED BY : K. KLICK 6/4/80

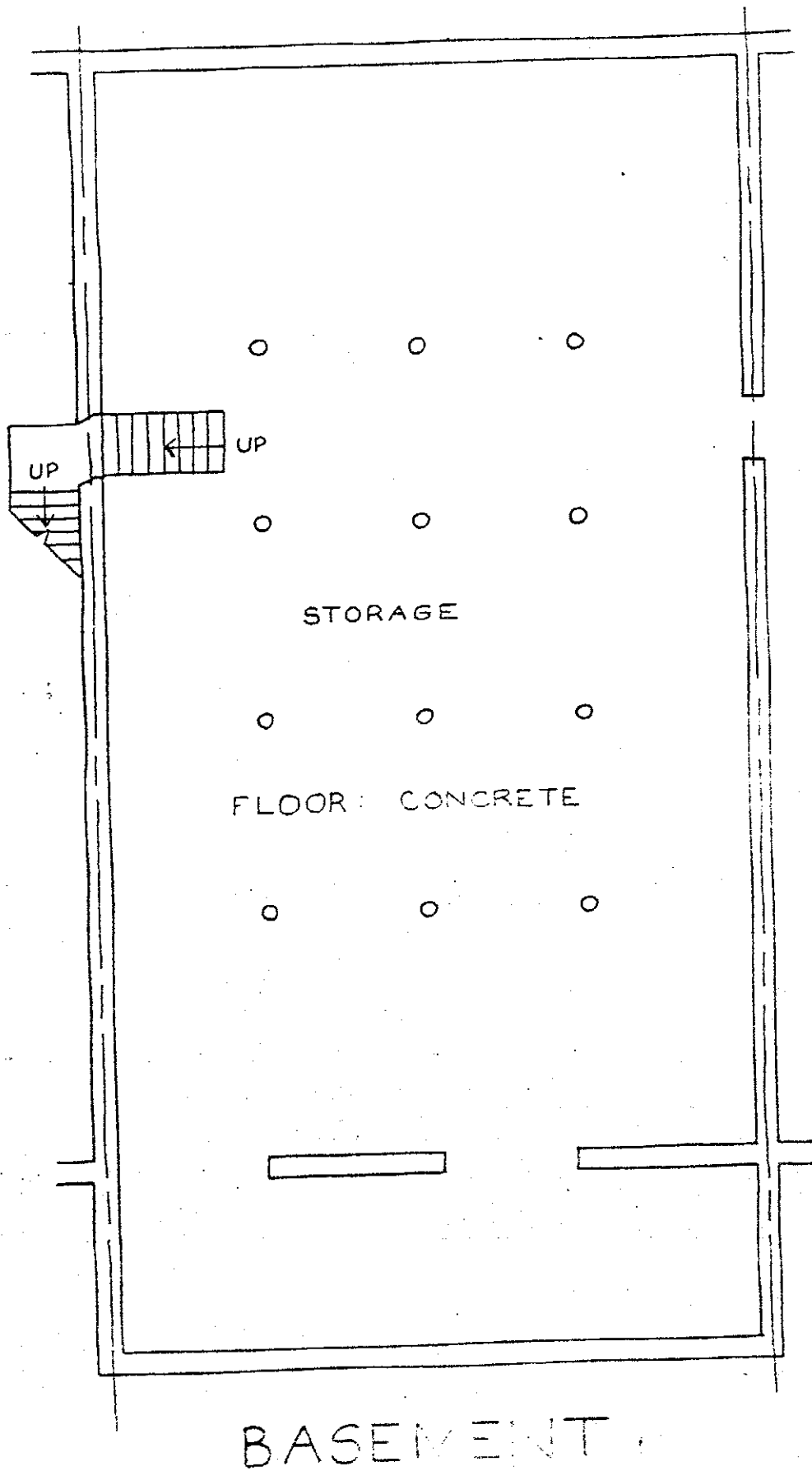
M. SCHNEIDERMAN

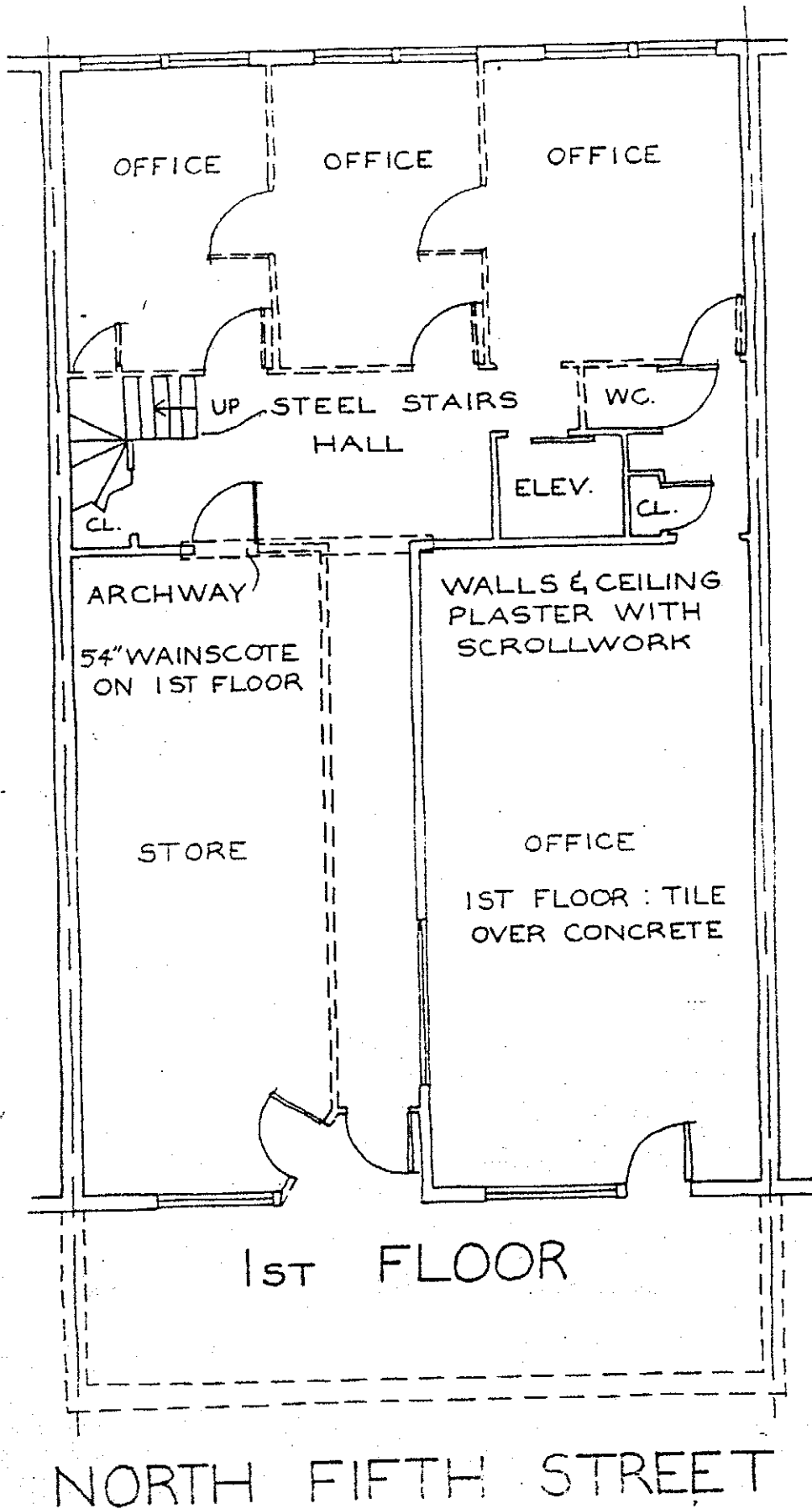
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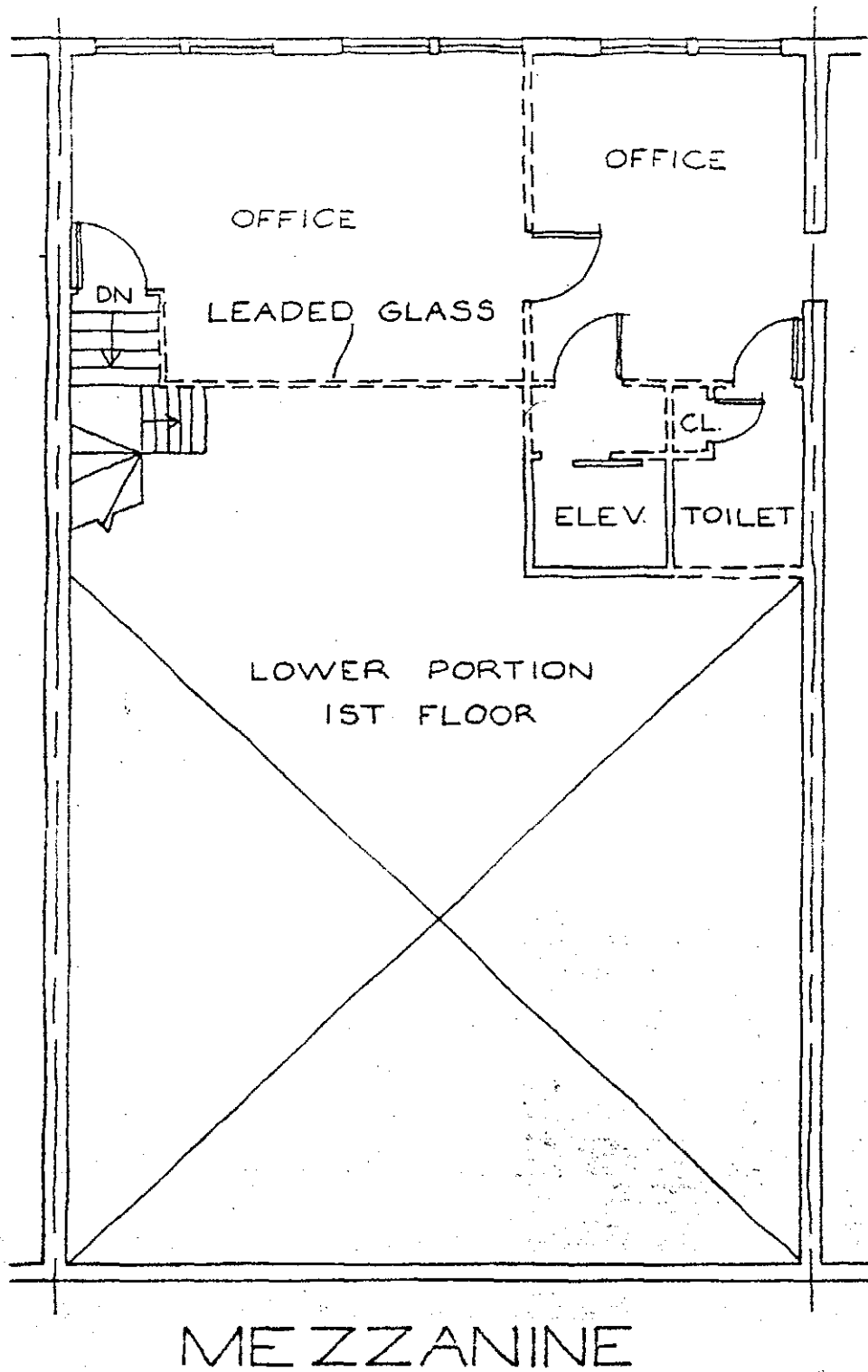
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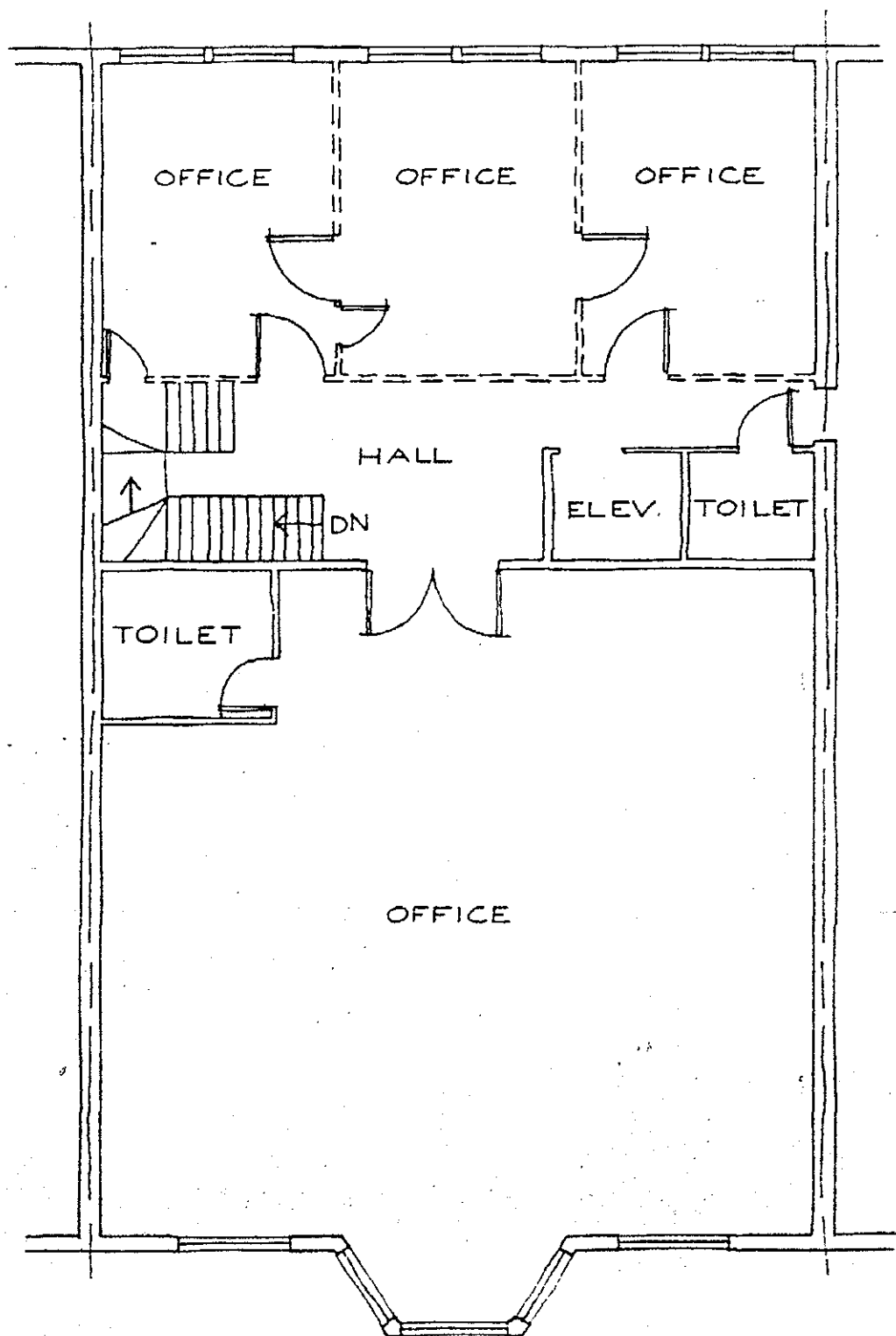








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